LEADERSHIP FROM THE INSIDE
Turning IS Managers into IS Leaders

BY BART BOLTON

MORE THAN EVER, IS NEEDS LEADERS

— not just at the top, but throughout the IS organization. It can only be done if we develop the person, not just the manager.

Jim, a middle manager in a relatively small IS shop, designed an Internet application that not just boosted his company's revenue, but changed the way his company and his industry works. When the opportunity presented itself, he stepped forward and lead a consortium of companies to implement his application, involving billions of dollars of revenue, across the entire industry. His self-confidence, passion to solve an industry problem and willingness to trust his gut brought results. Jim is a leader!

Eric, another middle manager in an IS department, used to manage a small group of technically-oriented people in a very quiet, unassuming manner. Today, his manager, the IS executive for the company, says Eric, a recent leadership program graduate, "... is more at ease in dealing with executive management; knows more about himself; he's more confident." He sees Eric as "... coaching others and taking more visible leadership, thinking through situations, not just the next step." Eric's people look up to him now and follow him. His style has changed. Eric has become a leader!

Leadership should not be the sole province of the CIO in the IS community. IS needs leaders and their skills throughout its organization, be they managers or individual contributors, be they executives or supervisors. Most projects fail because of people issues, not from failure to draw a good PERT chart.

LEADERS, NOW MORE THAN EVER

IS needs more Jims and Erics, and it needs them more — much more — than ever. As one CIO at a midwestern Fortune 200 company told me, "Up to now we've focused on mastering basic skills such as project management and presentation and writing skills. Now, we have to master leadership skills such as team building, choosing people carefully and developing them."

Just think about what is impacting IS:

■ The Internet is bringing the IS departments into the revenue stream of their companies, even more than electronic data interchange did 10 years ago. The sales and marketing functions are drawing on this new technology to produce orders. That puts the IS people into the front lines with the customers. Users are no longer just internal, fellow employees but real, money-paying customers.

"Our company has become so dependent on the use of the Internet to generate revenue that we've reorganized the whole company behind the IS organization which is now engaged with our prospects and clients via our web site," I heard from an IS executive of a service company.

■ IS organizations are reinventing themselves. Client/server, object-oriented programming and other technologies have put great strains on IS organizations. Rightsizing, re-engineering and the upheavals in various industries have taken their toll and placed increased demands on IS. Many organizations tried to accommodate these new demands using traditional approaches and structures. They are now realizing that IS itself must change how it does its business and its organizational structure to be successful.

■ IS organizations today are becoming much more process focused in order to be more flexible and adaptive to meet the constantly changing demands of the business. Many have resource pools, sometimes called Centers of Excellence, from which the company can draw highly skilled talent when needed. Others, in order to focus on customers, have established "account managers" to reach out to various parts of the company. Still other IS organizations provide internal consultants and experts in project management and process
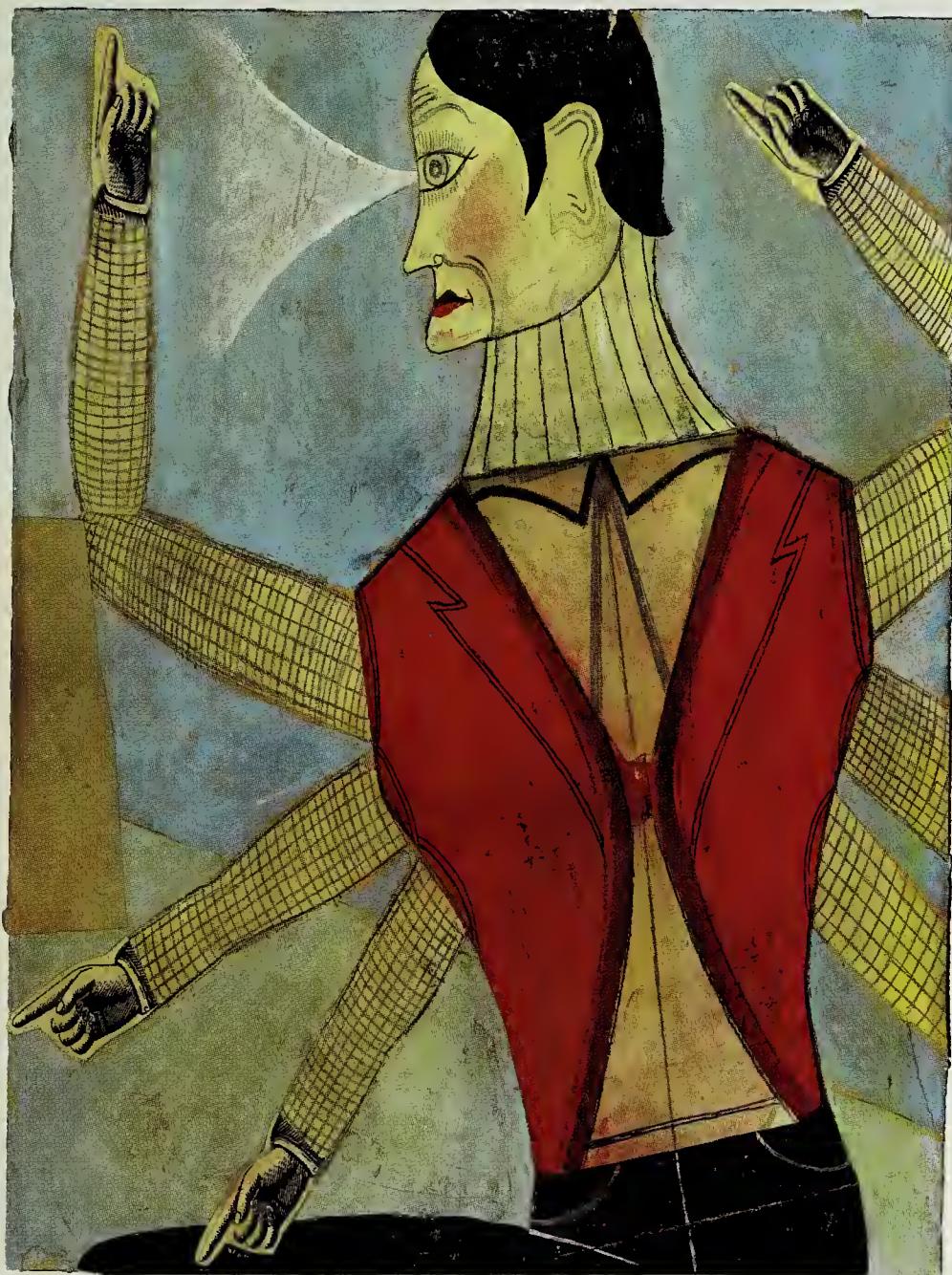
engineering to the rest of the business.

All these changes require leadership at every level in the IS organization. The core competencies of IS must include not just technical skills but behavioral traits: flexibility, concern for excellence, learning and self-confidence are needed to meet the constant stream of change.

CIOs need to do some organizational introspection to determine whether they encourage or reward their IS professionals and managers to exercise leadership. Do the core values of the department encourage IS people to take risks and know when to lead? Does the IS team distinguish leadership from management?

MANAGEMENT VS. LEADERSHIP

Historically, our organizations have focused on management techniques and skills planning, budgeting, and various administrative processes to operate their traditional hierarchies and stovepipes. Today, however, these management skills need to be balanced with leadership skills. In practice, that means our profession has to place more emphasis on developing leadership skills than management skills.

That's something that the young, up-and-coming IS managers seem to understand. Said a recent graduate of the Society for Information Management's Regional Learning Forum (RLF), "At my previous company, I was responsible for a 60+ person organization that provided IS/IT support for one of the divisions. Today, I have a group of 15 high-level technical specialists that are focused on distributed computing technologies — research, build prototypes, help IS organizations build architectures and make product decisions. It is a very heavy influencing role for a very large corporation. So leadership skills are key — it is very much a lead role within the company and [involves] very little of the traditional management [skills]."

Another graduate relates, "I changed from managing a group of application developers to an individual contributor role of researching and recommending various technologies. I now have to depend on leading by influence to get the right technical decisions made as the implementors no longer work directly for me."

Management and leadership are truly quite different. According to John P. Kotter in his book, *A Force for Change*, management is about planning and budgeting, organizing and staffing, controlling and problem solving. Leadership, on the other hand, is concerned with establishing direction and aligning people, as well as motivating and inspiring. He adds a valuable point: Too much management leads to bureaucracy and too much leadership leads to anarchy. What is needed is a blend or balance of the two.

The participants of the 1995 SIM Northeast RLF created a list comparing management and leadership during their nine-month forum. (See chart, "Management and Leadership: A Comparison," page 6.) They concluded, "A manager uses a map to determine the direction
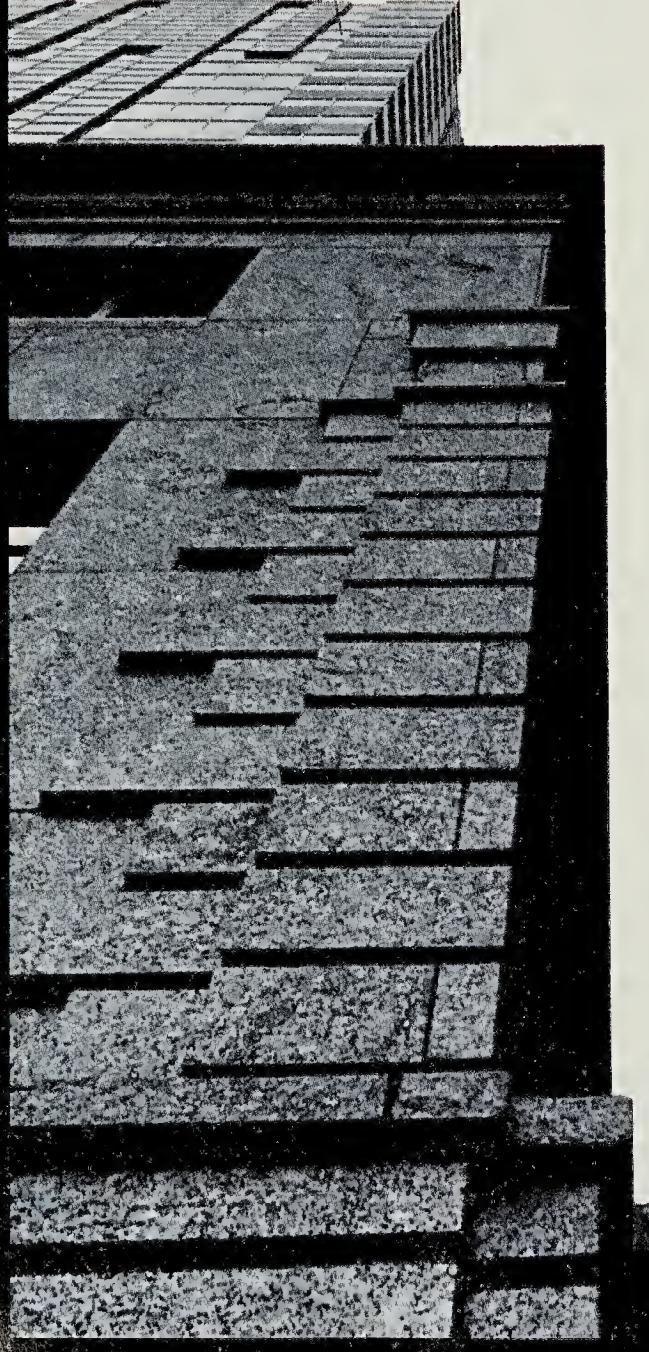
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Management and Leadership: A Comparison

Management	*Leadership*
THINKING PROCESS	
Brain (logic)	Heart (intuition)
Things	People
Inward focus	Outward focus
In the box	Out of the box
DIRECTION SETTING	
Plan	Vision
Bottom line	Top line
Short-range view	Long-range view
Sees trees	Sees forest
EMPLOYEE RELATIONS	
Control	Empower
Subordinates	Followers
Instructs	Learns
Directs and coordinates	Trusts and develops
MODUS OPERANDI	
Efficiency (do things right)	Effectiveness (do right things)
Asks "how" and "when"	Asks "what" and "why"
Copes with complexity	Tolerates ambiguity
Manages change	Produces change
Administers	Inspires
METHODS AND TOOLS	
Mission	Vision
Policies and procedures	Principles and values
Depends on process and system	Depends on people and ideas
Budgets	Relationships
Uses leverage	Builds complementary teams

Source: Participants of the 1995 SIM Northeast Regional Learning Forum

in which to go and a leader uses a compass." Their reading and discussions not only uncovered dramatic differences between the two but changed their management styles and how they operate in their work environment.

As one graduate said, "I am finding more win-win situations ... so many ways to get things done without having to get into face-offs. Even in my security role, I help them find ways to become policy compliant rather than order it to be so." And another said, "I realize that you can lead in a visible and vocal manner and that you can also do the same by working quietly behind the scenes."

One example in the IS world of the contrast between leadership and management is in project management. One leads the project team by empowering the people as opposed to controlling them and exercising project administration. Coaching and mentoring the team and encouraging them to take responsibility is more effective than older management styles especially with cross-functional teams.

IS people develop their leadership skills by constantly striving for a more holistic view. Developing trust-filled relationships with users, actively listening to their real issues, learning when and how to "say no," reading nontechnical books and business-related articles, developing a network of IS peers outside the company and learning to trust one's intuition more will build self-confidence in an IS person. Then, when the need is apparent, the IS professional will lead the solution and not just analyze the problem. Of course, our organizations can't operate in an "either/or" state. These young men and women know we need visions *and* plans, creativity *and* analysis, logic *and* intuition. The

point is, for now we need to place more emphasis on developing our leadership skills.

CIOs should look at their own leadership style even to the point of having an outsider explore how much leadership vs. control they exercise. A workshop with their direct reports and key staff members to develop the core values and principles of the organization is a good first step. Making significant books available and encouraging and participating in book discussions among the IS organization and/or having Friday afternoon learning forums with outside speakers are practices of some of today's IS leaders.

DEVELOP THE INDIVIDUAL

It has been my experience over the past four years of facilitating the SIM Northeast RLF that leadership begins with individuals knowing who they are, understanding the important influences on their lives and taking responsibility for their own personal development. If one doesn't have this basic understanding, the self-confidence won't be there with which to lead.

Pat Wallington, CIO of Xerox, once said, "The only capacities you need to be successful are: Learning to learn and learning to change." That is a basic formula for developing individual leaders.

Organizations should adopt this concept: Develop the individual, for the individual develops the organization. It is done successfully no other way! Individuals need to understand what is really important to them. What do they really believe in and would never compromise? These are their personal principles or core values. They make people who they are. They're the basis of one's ethics and leader-

ship style. Knowing who you are and what you are really good at — even to the point of understanding your lifetime's work and the legacy you want to leave behind — is critical in building leadership skills.

Graduates have told me time and time again that they are now able to work successfully and effectively with executives because their self-confidence has increased. It is because they have worked to maintain a balance among the three priorities of work, family and personal time. This balance maintains a more holistic view of one's world and allows one to be more adaptable and effective in all three parts.

In fact, one recent RLF graduate told me, "While recently interviewing 40 candidates for several openings, I felt far more cognizant of the balance in people. Given the choice between a 16-hour a day PERL/Java programmer and an eight-hour a day programmer who is also an accomplished cellist, I picked the cellist!" The RLF graduates understand the personal principle of "lifetime learning." They learn from all sources available to them — from a wide variety of books to an ever-expanding personal network. They under-

stand that personal growth ensures their effectiveness.

One graduate, who is now the president of a consulting firm, says that they "are rewriting every employee policy to allow the individual staff members to grow in their leadership skills." He believes they will then be more effective as consultants with their clients.

A strong sense of self is needed for the so-called "soft" interpersonal skills that are required for leadership and creative decision-making: effective communications, deep listening, facilitating, negotiating, working with conflict, relationship building, understanding how to work effectively in teams and knowing when to say "no." Each of these skills is a must for answering the demands of today's IS organization: managing complex projects, negotiating with users, vendors, and other parties, working with outsourcers, and establishing alliances and partnerships.

And because leaders are unique, growing individuals, individual leadership styles are different. These facts belie the myths that nearly all leaders are charismatic, bigger than life figures who are mysteriously born with these qualities. The vast majority of leaders are developed,
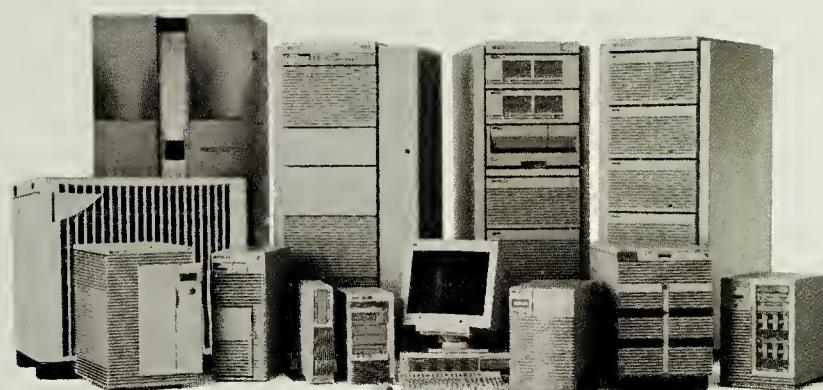
not born; they are products of their roots, their personal development and the environment in which they learn and grow. Nor are leaders "bigger than life"—not everyone is a John F. Kennedy or a Martin Luther King. Most leaders live quite normal lives out of the limelight and lead as the occasion demands it from them. And while it might be helpful to be charismatic, it is not essential. One does not have to be charming from the podium to operate as a leader.

What one does have to do, however, is to focus on both intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. If you don't understand yourself and know what you are good at and what is important to you, you will have a very difficult time leading others when you need to do so. Developing one's leadership skills is not a onetime process but one of a lifetime of continuous learning.

CIOs should determine and understand the critical competencies or behavioral traits of successful IS professionals, be they project managers, internal consultants, systems developers or technical architects. A gap analysis between "what should be" and "what is" in these individual competencies will make the case for the development of the individual.

ASSESSING YOUR LEADERSHIP

I have three suggestions for readers who wish to grow as leaders:

One of the best tests I've heard comes from Bill Glavin, president of Babson College in Wellesley, Mass. He says, "Once a month, stop and watch yourself go by!" How are you doing with your core values including your life's balance?

How well are your leadership skills developed? You might try taking the Personal Leadership Questionnaire (below). It's based

Personal Leadership Questionnaire

The higher the percentage of "yes" answers, the more effective your leadership skills probably are.

1. Do you have a vision of where you will be in the future and have you shared it with anyone else?
2. Have you documented your personal set of principles and core values by which you run your life?
3. Do you accept and adapt to change easily?
4. Are you someone who wants to make a difference and not just accept the status quo?
5. Do you accept total responsibility for your own personal growth and development?
6. Do you study successful people to apply their principles and lessons learned to your own experience?
7. Have you read several books in the last year for the purpose of learning and self-improvement besides technical manuals and journals?
8. Do you consider yourself very accomplished in interpersonal skills such as communication, facilitation, negotiation, presentation, feedback and listening?
9. Do you trust your intuition and draw on your creativity when making decisions?
10. Do you develop and maintain effective relationships with others?

IS Organization Leadership Questionnaire

The more "yes" answers, the more likely it is that your IS organization develops or encourages effective leadership.

1. Is there a documented vision of the organization in the future, and has it been internalized by the employees, the users and other key partners?
2. Is there a set of core values or principles by which all levels of the organization operate?
3. Does the organization focus on the development and growth of the individual as a primary key to success?
4. Is there a learning environment or context in which people can grow and advance?
5. Are the members of the organization encouraged to take significant risk and to use creativity in decision-making?
6. Is there effective teamwork in evidence?
7. Does the organization focus on revenue more than expense?
8. Do users and partners view the organization as very effective in project management, consulting and customer service?
9. Are effective interpersonal skills highly valued?
10. Is this organization the source of leaders for other organizations?

on my personal observations and understanding of leadership over the past four years in the leadership forum. Be honest with yourself as you answer the questions. The higher the percentage of "yes" answers, the more effective your leadership skills probably are.

Some IS organizations are more effective in developing leaders than others. To evaluate yours, try the IS Organization Leadership Questionnaire, in the accompanying chart. It is very similar to the personal leadership test and has the same set of origins. Again, the more "yes" answers, the more likely it is that your IS organization develops or encourages effective leadership. If there are not very many "yes" answers, it is time for a leadership development strategy and program.

Some other suggestions to consider:

■ Step back and think about the real skills of your high performers. Are they leaders?

■ Take time to study effective leaders.

■ Learn from a variety of books and encourage the others in your organization to do the same.

It is not easy to change our organizations but it is worth doing. As one of the RLF graduates told me, "The RLF taught me that culture changes slowly, but that people come around when you develop and share a vision with them and when you model the behaviors that you desire from them. I've made a difference here at [our organization] by slowly turning this ship around, one employee at a time. I've tried to improve communications throughout the organization and to make myself as accessible as I can be." That is the kind of leader our IS organizations need. Fortunately, it is the kind of leader our IS organizations can develop only if they strive to.

FURTHER READING ON LEADERSHIP

Books:
■ Warren Bennis, *On Becoming a Leader.* Addison-Wesley, Reading, Mass.,1989.
■ William C. Byham, *Zapp! The Lightening of Empowerment.* Fawcett Columbine, New York, 1988.
■ Stephen R. Covey, *Principle Centered Leadership.* Simon & Schuster, New York, 1990.
■ Max DePree, *Leadership is an Art.*

Dell Publishing, New York, 1989.
■ Kaleel Jamison, *The Nibble Theory and The Kernel of Power.* Paulist Press, New York, 1984.
■ John P. Kotter, *A Force for Change.* The Free Press (division of Macmillan, Inc.), New York, 1990.

Articles:
■ *"Leadership in a New Era"* (collection of essays), edited by John Renesch. New Leaders Press, Sterling

& Stone, Inc., San Francisco, 1994.
■ *"The Work of Leadership."* Ronald A. Heifetz & Donald L. Laurie, Harvard Business Review, January-February 1997.
■ *"Not Enough Generals Were Killed!"* Peter Drucker, *Forbes ASAP*, April 8, 1996.
■ *"How Tomorrow's Best Leaders Are Learning Their Stuff."* *Fortune*, Nov. 27, 1995.
■ *"What Exactly is Charisma?"* *Fortune*, Jan. 15, 1996.

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Bart Bolton is a Facilitator in Lifetime Learning from Upton, Mass. He currently serves as an educator, facilitator and consultant to both business and IS organizations and is the facilitator of the Northeast Regional Learning Forum for the Society for Information Management. He is a former IS executive with more than 30 years of experience in the IS management field. His E-mail address is bartbolton@aol.com. Previous *Computerworld* Leadership stories can be found online at www.computerworld.com/leadership.

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